DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 688 JC 020 390

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Oliver, Diane |
| TITLE | The U.S. Community College Model and Vietnam's Higher Education System. |
| PUB DATE | 2002-04-00 |
| NOTE | 22p.; Paper presented at Texas Tech University Vietnam Center Triennial Symposium (4th, Lubbock, TX, April 11-13, 2002). |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Community Colleges; *Developing Nations; *Educational Development; Educational Innovation; Educational Objectives; Foreign Countries; International Studies; Models; Program Implementation; Two Year Colleges |
| IDENTIFIERS | *Vietnam |

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on research conducted to determine if United States' community college model can be applied to higher education systems in developing countries. The author examined Vietnam's higher education system and conducted a case study of Can Tho University (CTU) in the Mekong Delta. First, common characteristics found among community colleges across the U.S. were synthesized into a representative model. Next, multiple data collection methods were used to analyze the higher education system in Vietnam and conduct the case study. The U.S. community college model was then analyzed in relation to the CTU case study, Mekong Delta context, and success criteria developed from examining higher education related to problems in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. Results of the study indicate that the U.S. community college model has significant potential for relieving some of the difficult higher education challenges in the Mekong Delta and throughout the country of Vietnam. The research design and methods of this study could also be used to conduct research on the potential effectiveness of the U.S. community college model in other developing countries. (Author/KP)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 464 688

# The US Community College Model and Vietnam's Higher Education System

Diane Oliver - Texas Tech University

The Vietnam Center's 4th Triennial Symposium
Texas Tech University - Lubbock, Texas

Abstract

This paper is a report of research conducted to determine if the US community college model holds promise for addressing problems commonly faced in the higher education system of one developing country and thus potentially others as well. The study was accomplished by examining the higher education system in Vietnam and conducting a case study of Can Tho University in the Mekong Delta. First, common characteristics found among community colleges across the US were synthesized into a representative model. Secondly, multiple data collection methods were used to analyze the higher education system in Vietnam and to conduct the case study. The US community college model was then analyzed in relation to the CTU case study, Mekong Delta context, and success criterion developed from examining higher education related problems in the Mekong Delta region and Vietnam.

Results of the study indicate that the US community college model has significant potential for relieving some of the difficult higher education challenges in the Mekong Delta. Although case studies cannot normally be generalized, Vietnam has a highly centralized education system and the problems faced by higher education in the Mekong Delta are reflective of those found throughout the country; therefore, the findings from this assessment can be considered significant for the rest of Vietnam. The research design and methods of this study could be used to conduct research on the potential effectiveness of the US community college model in other developing countries.

H220390

D Oliver

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# The US Community College Model and Vietnam's Higher Education System

By
Diane Oliver
The Vietnam Center
Texas Tech University

Paper presented at the Texas Tech University Vietnam Center's 4th Triennial Symposium
(Lubbock, TX, April 13, 2002)

# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to determine if the US community college model holds promise for addressing the major problems commonly faced by the higher education system of one developing country and thus potentially others as well. Many academics and provincial officials in Vietnam today have expressed interest in establishing US-like community colleges to provide trained people for the workforce and access to higher education for those who cannot attend universities. Many representatives from US community colleges have visited Vietnam over the past several years to teach seminars and discuss the positive characteristics of the US community college system. Yet, there does not seem to be much, if any, published research that specifically analyzes and assesses the applicability of the US community college model to Vietnam's context as it is today.

This research study was a careful analysis of whether or not the model would work. It was accomplished by consulting literature and human sources on each side of the comparison to identify higher education needs and the possible benefits of the model. Then a comparison was conducted to determine if there was a good enough "fit" to proceed. Thus the study used somewhat non-traditional social science research methods to appraise a potential higher education development.

Background

A review of the literature, as well as observations and interviews conducted during two fieldwork visits to Vietnam, showed that inadequate facilities and insufficient numbers of qualified teachers are serious problems throughout the Vietnamese education system. Many children in the lower grades must attend school in shifts: "The school year is shorter than international standards (165 days versus 185 days) and daily hours are shorter because school facilities are used many times within the same day" (Dinh, 1999, p. 11). In Vietnam's higher education system, only about 10% of the applicants that pass the national entrance examinations can be admitted.

Higher education systems in developing countries face many challenges, but there are at least four problems that generally stand out: (a) chronic underfunding accompanied by ever increasing demands for access; (b) underqualified and poorly paid faculty, many of whom are unmotivated; (c) underdeveloped curriculum, lack of teaching materials, as well as poor teaching techniques; and (d) the need to keep pace with a new global economy that "is changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of present (and future) wealth" (Task Force, 2000, p. 10). Vietnam's higher education system reflects many of these challenges. A listing of problems commonly found in developing countries and their relevance to Vietnam's higher education system is shown in Appendix A. The lack of motivation problem among the teachers primarily results from their having to work multiple jobs to earn enough income for themselves and their families to meet even minimal living standards. Higher education teaching salaries may

range from $35 to $70 per month depending upon the individual's years of experience and qualifications. Many of the teachers do not have the time, or remaining energy, to revise lectures and teaching methods.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided the study. The first is an overarching one and the other three questions serve in a support role.

1. Could the US community college model help Can Tho University and provincial leaders in the Mekong Delta address the primary higher education problems experienced in the delta region?

2. What is the US community college model?

3. What are the characteristics and primary problems of Vietnam's higher education system?

4. What is the history of thought and action regarding community colleges in Vietnam?

Conceptual Framework

Taking Vietnam as the case was too broad for a detailed inquiry; therefore, selection of a smaller critical case was necessary. In view of the fact that the Mekong Delta is one of the poorer areas in Vietnam, has been served by only one well established university since 1966, and the region provides 27% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), Can Tho University (CTU) is an excellent case for studying the potential value of a US community college model in Vietnam. Additionally, the leadership of CTU has strongly supported the concept of establishing

a community college system in the Mekong Delta. The CTU case study was qualitative and multiple data gathering techniques and sources were used, including interviews, observations documents, and archival information thus enabling triangulation as well as other procedures that enhanced the validity and reliability of the study.

A US community college model was analyzed against the CTU case study and the Mekong Delta context to evaluate the model's suitability. In addition to developing a representative US community college model and CTU case study, the researcher formulated criterion to use as a tool for evaluating the model's potential success in Vietnam.

## VIETNAM'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the time allotted for the presentation of this paper, it is not possible to provide a detailed picture of Vietnam's higher education system, but a small amount of background information is needed to understand the research study. For the academic year 2001 to 2002 MOET estimated that enrollments at universities and colleges would exceed 160,000, an increase of more than 13,000 from the previous year (IIE, 2001). According to one interview, during the same academic year Can Tho University could only accept 3,500 of the 14,000 students who applied and passed the national examination. "Given that more than 65 percent of Vietnam's 80 million residents are younger than 26, these numbers are expected to continue growing" (Kelly, 2000, p. 3).

A restructuring of the higher education system began in 1993 and several independent public institutions were consolidated into two multidisciplinary national and three regional

universities. Vietnam National Universities were established in Hanoi (1993) and Ho Chi Minh City (1995) while regional universities were organized in Da Nang, Hue, and Thai Nguyen (1994) (World Bank, 1997). Also, in 1993, two Open Universities were established, one in Hanoi and one in Ho Chi Minh City (Postiglione & Mak, 1997). According to the World Bank (1997), within a year, the Open Universities "accounted for 52,583 students, or approximately one out of every seven higher education students in the country" (p. 22).

By the 1997 to 1998 academic year, Vietnam's higher education system was comprised of "121 universities and colleges consist[ing] of 42 public higher education institutions, 15 people-established institutions, 63 [public] junior colleges and 1 people-established one" (MOET, 2000, p. 39). Provincial governments administratively manage colleges and junior colleges, offer 3 year courses, and present diplomas. At least two thirds of these institutions are solely for training elementary and middle (lower secondary) school teachers. Vietnam has also developed three different types of non-public higher education institutions: (a) semi-public, (b) people-founded, and (c) private.

"The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for policy making, guidance, and supervision in connection with all the education programs and the administration of the higher education institutions" (Postiglione & Mak, 1997, p. 363). Although the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has this major role, many institutions come under other ministries or more than one ministry or government agency, including the Ministries of Health, Construction, and Culture. "With regard to course organization, the Ministry of Education and Training approves

new courses and the education programs, develops the examination statutes, and confers degrees" (Potiglione & Mak, 1997, p. 365). MOET also reviews and authorizes the publication of textbooks, formulates enrollment regulations, and funds the fixed institutional expenses, such as maintenance and salaries. MOET and the Ministry of Finance (MOF) periodically issue guidelines concerning the range for fees that institutions are permitted to charge.

## THE US MODEL AND THE CTU-MEKONG DELTA CONTEXT

The first task was to establish a framework for the analysis, a set of criterion against which to judge the success of a community college model in the Mekong Delta. This was accomplished by synthesizing data gathered from interviews, documents, archival information, observations, and the literature to identify the most pressing problems that must be addressed through higher education. These problems were then converted into goal and objective statements that serve as success criterion. The second step was to evaluate the US community college model's characteristics and their potential effectiveness in meeting the objectives. CTU's strengths and the Mekong Delta's contextual features were also factored in.

### Success Criterion

The criterion for measuring potential success of a US community college model in the Mekong Delta is comprised of one overarching goal statement and multiple objectives that address the many problems experienced in the region. The overarching goal is to provide increased access to affordable, high quality higher education that is relevant to the economic

development of the Mekong Delta, and ultimately Vietnam. Under this overarching goal are 12 objectives.

1. To provide increased access to higher education at an affordable cost.

2. To provide higher education in the rural areas without creating a brain drain to the larger cities.

3. To provide students with relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities that will enable them to obtain related jobs upon graduation, establish new small to medium size businesses, and promote economic development in the provinces.

4. To assist people in the workforce with upgrading their skills and qualifications.

5. To develop a symbiotic relationship between higher education and industry that increases the relevance of education programs, employment opportunities, and economic development in the provinces.

6. To establish higher education institutions that are responsive to community needs and adapt quickly when the needs change or new ones arise.

7. To increase social equity by preparing disadvantaged minorities, such as the Khmers, to participate in higher education.

8. To increase equality by allowing fully qualified community college graduates to transfer to universities.

9. To raise the intellectual level of the Mekong Delta by offering remedial level courses that compensate for substandard primary and secondary education.

10. To ensure high quality education by establishing institutional assessment and quality control processes.

11. To diversify funding and thereby improve the infrastructure and maintenance of the higher education institutions.

12. To raise the qualifications and improve the instructional skills of higher education teachers.

In addition to these 12 objectives, the CTU case study shows an underlying theme of achieving sustained poverty reduction through the development of human resources, which has two components: (a) a strong emphasis on promoting economic growth and (b) agreement that the primary purpose of undergoing education and training is to find a job. Yet, CTU considers the academic, or general education side of community college education to be important as well. The government of Vietnam has established a national goal for higher education institutions to produce critical thinkers who are capable of performing the type of problem solving and decision making required to succeed in the global economy. Multidisciplinary, comprehensive programs offered in the US community college model provide the breadth of education needed to view decisions and problems from a more holistic, and potentially global, perspective.

Categorical Features of the US Community College Model

For the purposes of this analysis, the US community college model is represented by 10 fundamental characteristics.

1. Five common mission components are (a) open access and equity in admissions; (b) multidisciplinary, comprehensive programs; (c) an emphasis on teaching; (d) meeting the community's needs; and (e) life-long learning.

2. Five core education programs are (a) transfer, (b) technical and occupational, (c) remedial, (d) continuing, and (e) workforce development.

3. A broad age range of students, full time and part time, is accommodated.

4. Fifty percent of the curriculum is dedicated to liberal arts and the rest is primarily business, health fields, technology, and industry related.

5. Local industry helps with the development of relevant, up-to-date curricula, programs and instruction, provides internships, and encourages employees to continue their education.

6. Funding sources are diversified including state, student tuition and fees, local government, entrepreneurial activities, and grants.

7. State boards generally approve new programs and conduct audits while local boards set the tuition, appoint the president, and approve the budget.

8. Tuition is low and the location is close to home thus enabling access for people who cannot afford a 4 year degree program, but want to improve their education, transfer to a university or college to complete the last 2 years of their bachelor's degree, or enhance their employment opportunities.

9. Articulation agreements ensure synchronization between the 2 and 4 year institutions and protect students from erroneous expectations.

10. Institutional assessments ensure the identification of problems that impair the accomplishment of goals and reduce the quality of higher education.

Results

The analysis was conducted by comparing the success criterion objectives, contextual characteristics, and the US model as summarized in Appendix B. Results show that the US community college model is not a perfect fit for the Mekong Delta, but the model satisfies a majority of the objectives in the success criterion.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research study served to answer Research Question 1: Could the US community college model help Can Tho University and provincial leaders in the Mekong Delta to address the primary higher education problems experienced in the delta region? The study shows that the US community college model has significant potential for relieving some of the difficult higher education related problems experienced in the Mekong Delta. One of the most pressing problems is the increasing demand for access. Open admissions is not now feasible for Vietnam due to limited facilities and an insufficient number of qualified faculty. But, by increasing the number of more affordable, good quality institutions that offer the shorter duration associate degree programs, the student through-put rate is faster and the overall capacity of the higher education system can be substantially increased.

The US model also satisfies labor market needs more effectively than would increasing the number of university graduates who often have difficulty finding employment in the Mekong

Delta or move away to large cities. It provides the flexibility required to mold the community college in a way that matches the specific needs of the community served. This adaptability, combined with active linkages to employers in the local business sector, increases the relevance of programs and curricula. Additionally, graduates, through their employment and small business development, would contribute to continued economic growth in the region.

The academic courses, which are an essential component of the US community college model, are important to providing a holistic education experience. The purpose of education must go beyond economic growth to include development of critical thinking skills, good citizenship, constructive social initiatives, and an improved quality of life. The US community college model also can make a contribution to the achievement of greater equity and equality.

But there are barriers to adopting the US community college model and perhaps the greatest one is its inherent demand for autonomy. Agility and responsiveness are necessary for institutions to keep pace with the needs of the local business sector and community. A process that enables facilitation of change to curricula as well as canceling and adding programs is needed. Large bureaucracies, such as MOET, that are distant from the served community tend to be slow in making decisions and prefer uniformity across the country's higher education institutions to make administration easier. Yet, even within the centralized higher education system of Vietnam, the regional and local contexts must be accommodated to a much greater extent in the community colleges than is the case with universities.

The data and analysis in this research study indicate that problems faced by the Mekong Delta are consistent with those found in other parts of Vietnam, and particularly in the rural areas. Therefore, the results of this study have applicability for the country as a whole. In summary the problems that a US community college model could address in varying degrees are access, inadequate primary and secondary education, graduate unemployment, lack of equity, lack of equality, the brain drain from rural areas to large cities, and lack of quality assurance mechanisms.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations emanating from this study must be modest since additional research is needed to gain a greater understanding of Vietnam's higher education system and, more specifically, the applicability of different community college models in various parts of the country.

1. A pilot project using the US community college model should be started in the Mekong Delta and carefully evaluated over time using specific measures of effectiveness.

2. Greater autonomy should be given to People's Committees that are working with university sponsored community colleges so that the institutions have the flexibility required to align their programs and curricula with the changing needs of the local community.

3. Assessment and accountability processes are needed to ensure high quality in higher education programs and teaching.

4. Tax benefits and other incentives should be provided by the government to those businesses that work with community colleges in providing internships, qualified part time teachers, program support, and employment following graduation.

5. Economic development initiatives, such as enabling community colleges to provide start-up training and assistance for new entrepreneurs and small business people, for the community and student body, should be supported either with funding or in-kind contributions from the provincial government.

6. Similar research studies should be conducted in other developing countries to evaluate the potential effectiveness of the US community college model in dealing with problems experienced by their higher education systems.

The community college system has provided higher education opportunities to a large cross-section of US society for the past 100 years. This model was initially developed to meet the demands of an industrializing nation and has continued to help fulfill US socioeconomic needs through the present day. Other countries have examined and adapted the US model successfully and it shows significant promise for helping Vietnam and other developing countries to at least address some of their pressing human capital requirements. Of equal or perhaps greater importance, the model increases access to higher education for both young people and adults at an affordable cost and without leaving their local communities. These students are then able to strengthen their economic potential and enrich their personal lives.

# REFERENCES

Dinh, Q. Z. (1999, December). The state and the social sector in Vietnam: Reforms and challenges for Vietnam. ASEAN Economic Bulletin, 16 (3), p. 373, 19 p. Retrieved on July 30, 2000 from ProQuest database on the World Wide Web: http://proquest.umi.com

Institute of International Education (IIE)-Vietnam. (2001). Higher education in Vietnam update - April 2001. Unpublished report. Author.

Kelly, K. (2000). Higher education in Vietnam: Prospects for U.S. universities. Unpublished report, Institute of International Education (IIE).

Ministry of Education and Training, Socialist Republic of Vietnam. (2000). Vietnam education and training directory. Hanoi: Author.

Postiglione, G. A. & Mak, G. C. L. (Eds.). (1997). Asian higher education: An international handbook and reference guide. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

The Task Force on Higher Education and Society (2000). Higher education in developing countries: Peril and promise. (World Bank Stock No. 14630). Washington, DC: The World Bank.

The World Bank. (1997). Vietnam education financing. (World Bank Stock No. 14023). Washington, DC: Author.

## APPENDIX A

### Higher Education Problems in Developing Countries

This table provides a comparison of higher education problems experienced by developing countries in general and those that are specifically troubling Vietnam.

| PROBLEMS | DEVELOPING COUNTRIES | VIETNAM |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Dramatic increase in enrollments and demand. | x | x |
| 2. Decreased government spending on higher education, in real terms. | x | x |
| 3. Low salaries that result in staffing shortages and low motivation. | x | x |
| 4. Lack of faculty qualifications (lack of faculty with graduate level training). | x | x |
| 5. Lecture as the only teaching method. | x | x |
| 6. Lack of teaching materials (textbooks, audiovisual equipment, laboratories) | x | x |
| 7. Poorly stocked libraries (no interlibrary loans) | x | x |
| 8. Infrastructure deterioration, overcrowding, and lack of maintenance funds. | x | x |

| PROBLEMS | DEVELOPING COUNTRIES | VIETNAM |
|---|---|---|
| 9. Decline in primary and secondary education standards negatively affect higher education. | x | x |
| 10. Internal inefficiencies: low student-staff ratios, high dropout and repetition rates. | x | |
| 11. Graduate unemployment | x | x |
| 12. Low research output: lack of infrastructure, computers, equipment, current journals | x | x |
| 13. Political intervention: lack of academic freedom, promotion based upon connections. | x | x |
| 14. Lack of equity: higher education tends to be elitist. | x | x |
| 15. Lack of Autonomy: leadership at institutions lack decision making authority. | x | x |
| 16. Brain drain: out of the country and out of rural regions to the major cities. | x | x |
| 17. Lack of good management. | x | x |
| 18. Lack of quality assurance mechanisms and accountability. | x | x |

## APPENDIX B

**A Correlation of Success Criterion Objectives to Specific Characteristics of the US Community College Model.**

| Objective | Objective Description | US CC Model | Yes/No |
|---|---|---|---|
| #1 | Increase access | Open enrollment | No |
| | Increase affordability | Low tuition and close to home | Yes |
| #2 | Reduce the brain drain from rural areas | • Programs are relevant to local community needs and employment opportunities<br>• Provide local HE opportunities | Yes |
| #3 | Provide relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities for employment & economic development | • Meeting community needs<br>• Close ties with industry | Yes |
| #4 | Upgrade skills and qualifications of the workforce | • Wide age range, full time and part time students, and tailored programs<br>• Workforce development<br>• Close ties with industry | Yes |

| Objective | Objective Description | US CC Model | Yes/No |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | • Meeting community needs | |
| #5 | Form a close relationship with industry to improve the match between community college programs and human resource requirements | Local industry helps with program and curriculum updates, provides internships, and encourages employees to take workforce development courses provided by the community college | Yes |
| #6 | HE that is responsive to community needs and adapts quickly when needs change | Responsive to community needs. Updates programs and curricula to match the labor market. Provide flexibility in establishing new programs and discontinuing those that are no longer relevant | Possibly |
| #7 | Increased equity in HE | Remedial education programs | Yes |
| #8 | Increased equality | • Remedial programs<br>• Transfer programs<br>• Articulation agreements | No<br>Yes<br>Yes |
| #9 | Raise the intellectual level of | • Remedial education | Yes |

| Objective | Objective Description | US CC Model | Yes/No |
|---|---|---|---|
| | people in the Mekong Delta to compensate for inadequate non-tertiary education experiences | • Workforce development<br>• Continuing education | |
| #10 | Increase education quality through institutional assessment processes | • Institutional research function<br>• Program reviews & faculty evaluations<br>• Internal reviews related to accreditation | Yes |
| #11 | Diversify funding to improve the infrastructure and maintenance | Diversified funding sources include the state, students, local government, entrepreneurial contracts, and grants | Yes |
| #12 | Raise the qualifications and instructional skills of teachers | • Emphasizes teaching skills through workshops and seminars<br>• Teachers responsible for updating their academic field knowledge/skills | Yes<br><br>No |